Voltaire's 2nd Apparition

Hearing the bell, Brother Plácido sat up on the platform, crossed himself, and lay down on the ground.
A cold, splendid moon made the shards of glass embedded in the edge of the ancient walls surrounding the convent shine.
The friar opened his shutter and saw horrifying sights in that graveyard where his former brothers in religion slept underground, awaiting the angel's trumpet that would call them to judgment.
The cemetery was a gloomy orchard, abandoned to wild weeds for centuries due to a lack of gardeners.
And among those bushes, coming from the depths, a very strange beast appeared.
Brother Plácido adjusted his glasses, fearing that his eyes would betray him.

—"Lord, God of hosts! What apocalyptic animal is this?" At the same time, a whirlwind like four opposing winds furiously shook the grove, without even a blade of grass reaching it.
—Am I dreaming, perhaps? he said to himself, and repeated a verse from the prophet Joel read at Mass one of those days: *Senes vestri somnia somniabunt* (Your old men will have dreams), which would be a sign of the end times.

That beast was evidently a lion, but it had the wings of an eagle.
Suddenly it lost its wings, reared up, and resembled a man.
Behind it appeared another, like a lean, hungry bear that had found a horrible meal among the graves, for it was devouring three ribs.
Both beasts stood side by side, allying themselves, and faced the road, where a third appeared, spotted, like a very strong leopard with four heads.

And almost attached to it was a fourth beast, unlike any on earth, with steel teeth that flashed like sabers under the moon, and feet so powerful they pulverized the rubble and boulders of the ground. This fourth beast had ten horns, among which a tiny horn sprouted, grew and transformed, and had human eyes and a proud and disdainful mouth.
Fray Placido closed his eyes and turned away from the window; he understood that the vision Daniel had seen in the first year of Balthazar, king of Babylon, was being repeated before his eyes, and that the four beasts prefigured the four empires that would exist in the end times; and once they were destroyed, Christ would come on the clouds to judge the living and the dead.
He looked again and thought that the first beast represented Freemasonry, planted in the bosom of many nations and a secret ally of the bear of Satania, which devoured three ribs; these were Scandinavia, Turkey, and India. The mighty leopard could be none other than England, and its four wings and four heads, the symbol of its allies and dominions.
As for the beast, resembling none and armed with ten horns, he reasoned that it was Judaism, which is like a state within the organism of many nations, all of which it secretly rules and dominates.
And that little horn that was born among the other ten and grew up with the eyes of a man and a haughty mouth, that fought and defeated the ten...?
A new empire? Perhaps the Antichrist?
At that moment, he heard the horrifying voice of Voltaire, who ten years earlier had appeared to him on a similar night.

—"I promised you I would return," he said, "and here I am."
—"None of the things you announced to me have come to pass," the friar replied disdainfully, but without sprinkling holy water on him, because he wanted to extract his secrets.
—"The time hasn't come yet... there are ten years left... twelve years...No more than fifteen years..."
—"What's left?"
—"In due time, you will see."
—"You announced to me that the Antichrist had already been born..."
—"And I didn't lie." Today he is a young man of twenty, preparing himself in the study of science and the arts for the most tremendous destiny a mortal can have.
— Where does he live?
— I cannot reveal it to you.
— Who are his teachers?
— The devil, through Talmudists and fakirs.
— Some theologians maintain that he will be possessed by Satan and that he will not be morally free, but fatally determined to evil. Is that true?
— It is not true. The Antichrist is morally free; he could do good if he wanted to, but his pride is infinitely greater than that of any other man. I myself, in comparison to him, was a poor man in spirit...
— Does he have a guardian angel?

— Yes, like all men. And also, like all men, he has a special tempting demon, who is the highest in the infernal hierarchy; such as no one has ever had, not Nero, nor Luther, nor I; it is Lucifer himself.
—"Unfortunate youth!" exclaimed the friar. "Could he perhaps be saved?"
— Yes. The blood of the Infamous One has redeemed him too. But his obstinacy is so great that, even acknowledging that the Messiah is the Son of God, if he were to find him, with his own hands he would nail him again to the cross.
— And is he aware of his destiny?
— No! Not even Satan, before his fall, was aware of his future damnation.
— Saint Paul says of the Antichrist that he will possess all the seductions of iniquity... Is he really so beautiful?
— The most beautiful of Adam's descendants. No one can compare with him. Men and women will go mad when they see him.
Although he is young, he already has every imaginable vice: ambition, cruelty, shamelessness; and yet those who know him believe him endowed with the greatest virtues, so skillful is he at dissimulation.
— When will his universal reign begin?
— When the withered tree blossoms.
—Voltaire... are you suffering?
—Ten years ago I left you a sign. Did no one believe it?
—No; those who saw my molten bronze candlestick attributed it to a lightning bolt or a distant experiment.
—Do you see my hand? I'm going to stamp it on the wall.

The grieving shadow turned to the white wall and barely touched it with its open palm, and immediately the plaster melted to a depth of an inch.

—Woe to you! the old man said in horror.
—Think that they still show me mercy, and that if Omnipotence did not restrain me, I myself, under the weight of my own obstinacy, would sink into seas of fire known only to the Antichrist.
—Can't I do anything for you?
—The time has passed when I could have done everything with just a tear, and I refused. And now no one can do anything; And if anyone could, I wouldn't want to.
—"May I ask you something?"
The shadow leaned forward.
— Question!
— I have seen in the garden...
— I know; Daniel's vision.
— What nations do these beasts mean?
— They are not nations; they are the four supreme doctrines that at the end of the world will ally to combat the Infamous One.
— What are they?

— Judaism, Islam, paganism, and rationalism, or, as it is now called, liberalism. This last is the ten-horned beast, because it has spawned ten errors; and the eleventh, which will destroy the other ten and fight the Infamous One, face to face.
— Which is it?
—The most sinister plot that men could have invented, under the immediate inspiration of the devil, to prepare the way for the Antichrist... Rationalism, which I engendered, in turn engendered atheism, from which the last religion of this world was born: Satanism... In ten years I will return.

The shadow of the reprobate disappeared with these words.
For many days on the whitewash of the wall, the black mark of a bony hand could be seen; but no one wanted to believe the sign.
They thought that Fray Plácido was senile, and some swore they had seen that hand for a long time, ever since the cell was once restored and a bricklayer leaned absentmindedly against the fresh plaster.

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